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Sermon Notes

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The Bitter Struggle with Sin, Part 2

Romans 7:13-17

I. The Plague of Plagues

A. The Great Plague of London: 1665

B. Ralph Venning, 1669: *The Plague of Plagues* (SIN)

1. Took Romans 7:13 as starting point

2. Seven major observations

a. The law of God as a whole and in every part is good

b. This good law, when transgressed, makes man over to death

c. Though the law condemns man's fault, and man for his fault, yet the law is still good and not to be blamed

d. It is not the law, but sin, that works man's death and ruin

e. Sin works man's death and destruction by that which is good, namely, the law

f. Sin is therefore exceedingly sinful and wicked

Venning: "Sin is most immeasurably spiteful, poisonous, and pernicious, because it kills men. And not only so, but it kills them by that which is good, and what was appointed to man for life; it turns food into poison."

g. Lastly, sin by the commandment appears to be excessively sinful

Venning: "If we look on this through the microscope-glass of the law, it will appear a most hideous, devilish and hellish thing, the most wicked, mischievous, virulent, villainous, and deadly thing that ever was. Sinful sin! Worse than the Devil!"

Why so evil? It's one thing to do wrong unknowingly... it's another thing entirely to receive a pure holy law from our eternal loving Creator, and defy Him directly through rebellion. Law therefore exposes the basic nature of sin, and pulls it out for all to see

vs. 13 "But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful."

C. What Is Sin?

Venning: "Sin is transgression of God's good law.... Now the law not only forbids the doing of evil, whether by thought, word, or deed, but also commands the doing of good. So to omit the good commanded is sin, as well as is the doing of the evil that is forbidden."

D. Why is Sin so Wicked?

1. Contrary to God

a. contrary to His Holy nature

Habakkuk 1:13 "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, you cannot tolerate wrong."

1 John 1:5 "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all."

Venning: "As God is holy, all holy, only holy, altogether holy, and always holy... so sin is sinful, all sinful, only sinful, altogether sinful, and always sinful.... As in God there is no evil, so in sin there is no good. God is the chiefest of goods, and sin is the chiefest of evils. As no good can be compared with God for goodness, so no evil can be compared with sin for evil."

b. contrary to His attributes

- i) deposes God's **sovereignty**: it says like Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?"
- ii) denies God's **all-sufficiency**: the prodigal left home because his Father's house was not sufficient to satisfy him
- iii) defies God's **justice**: says that God's laws are unjust, or it mockingly dares Him to bare His holy arm and judge
- iv) disowns God's **omniscience**: it says, "God cannot see what I do in secret"
- v) despises the riches of God's **goodness**... not knowing that God's patience is to lead sinners to repentance
- vi) defiles God's **grace**: turning it into a license for immorality

2. Contrary to Man

God is the highest good of man... all our good gifts come from Him

Therefore, anything which separates us from our highest good is the greatest evil

Sin is responsible for every evil that has befallen the human race since the beginning of time

Why is sin a greater enemy to man than the devil? The devil cannot send you to eternity in hell, but sin can!

- Sin is the ultimate enemy of everything you hold dear and precious... there's not a day that goes by that we do not feel the sting of its whip; no earthly blessing from God is free from its pollution
- The joy of human relationships are tainted by our sin; our happy homes are turned miserable, our churches, too... even nations can be ruined by sin
- Sin evicted man from the perfect Eden, and has been evicting man from every Eden ever since
- Sin murdered Abel, and has murdered millions since
- Sin brought the worldwide flood; Sin built the Tower of Babel; Sin delayed Israel from entering the Promised Land; Sin ultimately evicted Israel from the Promised Land; Sin brought down Solomon's pure love for God, Sin also brought down Solomon's magnificent gold temple
- And it was Sin that crucified the Son of God on the darkest day in human history
- Sin is a vicious, wicked, virulent foe... and worst of all, sin lives strongly even now in the hearts of every single person who hears the word preached today... and in the one who preaches the word as well

The joyful news of the Gospel:

Romans 6:14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

NOW... if sin is so utterly wicked, and if we have died to sin once for all and sin has absolutely no dominion over us any longer, why do we still yield to sin?

That is precisely the question I believe that Romans 7 seeks to answer

II. Context

A. Last Week: Overview of Romans 7

1. Was Paul speaking as a Christian or non-Christian
2. Extremely difficult to answer

Illus. White board flipping back and forth in the car... every time I read another reputable commentator, I switched my views

3. One commentator: "It is possible to hold the wrong view of Romans 7 and yet have the right view of the Christian life!!"

Why? Because the passage is difficult!!!

4. Either the passage thinks too lowly of Christians OR too highly of non-Christians

Can a Christian say:

vs. 14 I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.

That seems to contradict Romans 6:14

Romans 6:14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

BUT can a non-Christian say:

vs. 22 in my inner being I delight in God's law

That seems to contradict what we'll learn about non-Christians in Romans 8:

Romans 8:7 the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so

B. The Limitations of the Law vs. the Power of the Spirit

1. Either way... both side can agree that this passage shows the limitation of LAW
 - a. law cannot justify
 - b. law cannot sanctify either

Galatians 3:2-3 I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? ³ Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

- c. human effort to keep the law CANNOT advance you one step in your Christian life
2. NOTE: the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in this section

- a. some say this PROVES Paul is speaking as a non-Christian
- b. others say, “No, this proves he’s speaking as an immature Christian”
- c. BUT I SAY “Of course the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in this apparently losing battle with sin... because the absolute guarantee of the Christian life is that the Spirit is undefeatable in the Christian”

Galatians 5:16 So I say, live [walk] by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Galatians 5:18 If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

Galatians 5:25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

C. “Come into Romans 8”??

- 1. Some say this is the picture of the immature Christian, who has not yet learned the true power of the Holy Spirit
- 2. Such people say: “You’ve got to grow up out of Romans 7 into Romans 8”

Romans 7: the “carnal Christian,” behaving like a non-Christian

Romans 8: the “Spirit-filled Christian”, fulfilling the Law of God by the power of the Spirit

- 3. I SAY: Romans 7 AND Romans 8 will BOTH continue to be your experience until the day you die, although I wish it were not so!!

D. Already and Not-Yet

- 1. Power of the New Age has broken in with the coming of the Holy Spirit
- 2. Holy Spirit leads us in a powerful new life, radically different from our previous existence
- 3. BUT the experience of the Spirit in our present fleshly existence is only a FORETASTE of our future perfection

Ephesians 1:13 Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.

“Deposit” = small downpayment on the inheritance... a “monthly stipend” until we get the full amount

When do we get the full amount? When we are glorified in heaven with our perfect resurrection bodies:

Romans 8:23 *Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*

E. NOW however, we struggle with this body of death

1. "Body of death"

vs. 21-24 *So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?*

2. "Body of sin"

Romans 6:6 *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.*

3. "Mortal body"

Romans 6:12 *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.*

4. "Parts [members] of your body"

Romans 6:13 *Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.*

5. "Jars of clay"

2 Corinthians 4:6-7 *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. ⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*

6. "Members on the earth"

Colossians 3:5 *"Consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and greed..."*

Consistent teaching from Paul: the fleshly (earthly) part of you is a ready-made tool for sin... an easy entry point for sin to come and entice you and drag you away. The repeated commands to not let that happen show that it can happen if we don't walk by the power of the Spirit

BUT in heaven, we will lose these mortal bodies and receive immortal resurrection bodies with no sinful tendencies whatsoever!!!

Until then, we must struggle with sin

That is the point of Romans 7

III. Cycles of Lamentation: vss. 14-23

Paul gives four laments over his struggle... the first three follow a pattern; the fourth is different

Pattern = "Condition" "Conflict" "Cause"

Condition = mixed, fleshly and spiritual

Conflict = Proof of condition, constant conflict between new nature and sin nature

Cause = Cause of struggle... indwelling sin, residing in the "flesh"

BUT collectively they make clear points: how wretched we are naturally and what a vicious and powerful foe is sin, and how impotent is the law to change us in any way

THEREFORE we should cry out against ourselves and lament our sinfulness most bitterly

A. The First Lament: vss. 14-17

1. Condition

vs. 14 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin..

2. Conflict

vs. 15-16 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.

3. Cause

vs. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me

B. The Second Lament: vss. 18-20

1. Condition

vs. 18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.

2. Conflict

vs. 18-19 *For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing.*

3. Cause

vs. 20 *Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.*

C. The Third Lament: vss. 21-23

1. Condition

vs. 21 *So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.*

2. Conflict

vs. 22-23 *For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind*

3. Cause

vs. 23 *and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.*

D. The Final Lament: vss. 24-25

vs. 24-25 *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.*

IV. The First Lament: A Careful Look

A. Condition

vs. 14 *We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin..*

1. The problem is NOT with the law... it's with ME

2. "Unspiritual" = "carnal", "fleshly," behaving like a pagan

3. "Sold as a slave"... VERY DIFFICULT PHRASE

a. the very thing we've learned can NEVER be said of a Christian

b. YET I hold that Paul is speaking as a Christian... Why?

c. Paul explains himself more thoroughly later

vs. 18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.

vs. 25 So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

Paul's true identity, the new man, created in Christ Jesus, can NEVER be a slave to sin

BUT Paul also has this flesh, this "body of sin" which is admirably suited to sin... so much so it behaves like a slave, at the constant beck and call of temptation

B. Conflict

vs. 15-16 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.

1. The conflict is in the mind... the seat of the soul
2. My own behavior is an utter perplexion to me!!!

Illus. Vitamin up the nose... "Why did you put the vitamin up your nose?" Foolishness. All sin is insanity

3. "I want" vs. "I do"... utter contradiction

Galatians 5:17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

Both the flesh and the Spirit YEARN, WANT, DESIRE

Therefore, we are constantly in conflict... our desires battling within us; we are never 100%

Never 100% happy to sin; never 100% happy to serve God

Also... we see more of God's will than we can actually live out; My reach exceeds my grasp

Illus. Beautiful scenery, try to paint with top quality materials but no talent... I can see it, I can imagine painting a perfect rendition of what I see... there's nothing wrong with the scenery, there's nothing wrong with the equipment, BUT THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH ME!!!

What I love and what I hate are conditioned by my new nature... so I love the law of God, and I hate sin

BUT the very things I love I don't do; the very things I hate I do! What is this insanity???

4. The "Approval" of the law is built in... "I agree that the law is good"

Psalm 119: The Psalmist's Delight

14 I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.

32 I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.

35 Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight.

47 I delight in your commands because I love them.

Paul says he approves of God's law as holy and just and good... but he can't seem to live it out

C. Cause

vs. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me

1. Paul gets to the root cause: SIN LIVING IN ME
2. Here he personifies sin as though it were some kind of living thing, like a tumor, or a parasite in his bloodstream or a virus attacking his brain
3. SIN is the enemy... and it makes a perfect Christian life impossible in this present age
4. BUT this does NOT mean Paul abandons his responsibility

When Paul says "It is no longer I myself who does it"... he is NOT denying personal responsibility; if he were, why would he grieve so much, and lament over the sin in him?

5. NO LONGER: blessed truth... I am a changed person...
 - a. formerly I approved of sin... I loved it, I gladly chose it
 - b. NOW that old person is dead with Christ
 - c. the new true self, "I" is a new creation in Christ

Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."

NO LONGER= radical transformation

This MUST be a Christian; a non-Christian cannot say "no longer"... he's the same person he always was

YET sin remains strong... "I no longer do it, but sin is alive in me!!!"

Sin shall never be master again... it shall never be emperor; yet sin still lives within us

V. Application

- A. Be warned: everything we do is deeply tainted with sin
- B. Be humbled: you cannot control even your own self [unlike God]
- C. Be grieved: your sin is your responsibility... even more now that we have been set free from sin and have the law written on our hearts and the indwelling Holy Spirit
- D. Be instructed: the law cannot sanctify you
- E. Be assured: struggle with sin can be a good sign